

Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the W.A. Group

Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

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ALFRED COVE FIVE YEARS ON

A walk around Alfred Cove and Point Waylen to examine the physical changes over the last five years would not reveal great changes. There has been an increase in samphire; the establishment of introduced trees; a subtle change in the shape of the waterline within the Cove itself and perhaps a rather more dominant intrusion of drains through the reeds and samphire.

Similarly, birdlife itself has changed little in diversity or apparent overall numbers. Naturally, after many additional hours of observation, the species list is far more extensive and we have a greater understanding of how birds utilise the area. Indeed, as with the physical appearance, the changes to the birdlife are very subtle.

The Alfred Cove-Point Waylen area continues to excite public comment but five years on there seems to be a groundswell of birders and general public alike who are coherently and with an ever louder voice calling for the establishment of the whole area as an 'A' Class Aquatic Reserve.

Even now, however, government departments are still failing to make the decisions required to fully protect this most valuable wetland area. Why this is so is a mystery to me, since everyone involved seems to agree on its importance. For example, Conservation and Land Management is physically managing the small area for which it has responsibility and the Department for the Environmental Protection Authority has commissioned a preliminary report (Alfred Cove: An Analysis and Discussion of the Biological Inventory with Particular Attention to the Avifauna of the Area, S. Keeling, DCE, Perth, 1987, in press).

There seems little doubt that officers of the various government bodies are sympathetic and that birders and public alike will continue to pressure department heads and their political masters to secure the area in the manner recommended in the System 6 report.

Surely by 1992 the area will have enjoyed some years of total protection. I am optimistic!

S. Keeling



SPECIES LIST FOR ALFRED COVE/PT WAYLEN

- R = Rare Few sightings, i.e., 1-6 birds or seen on very few occasions (e.g. Fork-tailed Swift — 200+ birds seen once)
- C = Common The species may be easily observed in its regularly observed season.
- U = Uncommon May be seen occasionally
- D = Dispersal Term confined to passerines — indicates that birds were thought to be passing through in seasonal dispersion.
- M = Regular Seen most years
- B? = Breeds? Breeding unrecorded but further investigation may possibly show breeding takes place
- B = Breeding Breeding known to have taken place
- | | | | |
|-------------------------|------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| Great Crested Grebe | R | Red Knot | C |
| Hoary-headed Grebe | C | Great Knot | C |
| Australian Grebe | R | Sharp-tailed Sandpiper | C |
| Australasian Pelican | C | Pectoral Sandpiper | R/M |
| Darter | U | Red-necked Stint | C |
| Pied Cormorant | C | Long-toed Stint | R |
| Little Pied Cormorant | C | Curlew Sandpiper | C |
| Great Cormorant | C | Sanderling | R/M |
| Little Black Cormorant | C | Broad-billed Sandpiper | R |
| Pacific Heron | R | Ruff | R |
| White-faced Heron | C | Silver Gull | C |
| Great Egret | C | Whiskered Tern | R/M |
| Cattle Egret | R | White-winged Tern | R |
| Rufous Night Heron | R | Arctic Tern | R |
| Sacred Ibis | C | Gull-billed Tern | R |
| Straw-necked Ibis | R | Caspian Tern | C |
| Yellow-billed Spoonbill | R | Roseate Tern | R |
| Black Swan | C | Fairy Tern | C/B? |
| Australian Shelduck | CB | Crested Tern | C |
| Pacific Black Duck | CB | Domestic Pigeon | C/B |
| Grey Teal | C | Spotted Turtle-Dove | U |
| Chestnut Teal | R/M | Laughing Turtle-Dove | C/B |
| Blue-billed Duck | R | Musk Lorikeet | Extinct? has bred |
| Australasian Shoveler | U | White-tailed Black Cockatoo | U |
| Hardhead | U | Galah | C/B |
| Maned Duck | R | Rainbow Lorikeet | R |
| Musk Duck | U | Red-capped Parrot | U |
| Osprey | U/M | Port Lincoln Parrot | C/B |
| Black-shouldered Kite | C | Budgerigar | Escapee? |
| Whistling Kite | R | Pallid Cuckoo | U/D |
| Brown Goshawk | U | Fan-tailed Cuckoo | R/D |
| Collared Sparrowhawk | U | Fork-tailed Swift | R |
| White-bellied Sea-Eagle | R | Sacred Kingfisher | U/D |
| Little Eagle | R | Laughing Kookaburra | U/M |
| Marsh Harrier | R | Rainbow Bee-eater | C/B |
| Peregrine Falcon | R | White-backed Swallow | R |
| Australian Hobby | U | Welcome Swallow | C/B |
| Australian Kestrel | C | Tree Martin | C/B |
| Quail species | U | Richard's Pipit | C/B |
| Buff-banded Rail | C/B? | Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike | U/M/B |
| Spotless Crake | C/B? | White-winged Triller | R/D |

Purple Swamphen	R/U?	Clamorous Reed Warbler	
Australian Crake	R		R/has bred?
Eurasian Coot	R	Little Grass-bird	U/has bred
Banded Lapwing	R	Rufous Songlark	R/D
Pied Oystercatcher	U	Brown Songlark	R/D
Grey Plover	C	Western Thornbill	R
Lesser Golden Plover	U/M	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	C/B
Red-kneed Dotterel	U	Weebill	R
Hooded Plover	R	Red-capped Robin	R/D
Large Sand Plover	R/M	Grey Fantail	C
Red-capped Plover	C/B	Willie Wagtail	U/M
Black-fronted Plover	R	Rufous Whistler	C/B?
Black-winged Stilt	C/B	Varied Sittella	C/B
Banded Stilt	U/M	Rufous Treecreeper	R/D
Red-necked Avocet	C	Striated Pardalote	C/B?
Ruddy Turnstone	R	Mistletoe Bird	U
Eastern Curlew	R	Silvereye	C/B?
Whimbrel	R	Brown Honeyeater	C/B?
Wood Sandpiper	R	Singing Honeyeater	C/B
Grey-tailed Tattler	U/M	Red Wattlebird	C/B
Common Sandpiper	C	White-fronted Chat	U/M/D
Greenshank	C	Australian Magpie-Lark	U/M/B?
Marsh Sandpiper	R	Grey Butcherbird	R
Terek Sandpiper	R/M	Australian Magpie	C/B
Black-tailed Godwit	R/M	Australian Raven	C/B
Bar-tailed Godwit	C		

TOTAL SPECIES LIST = 132

SPECIES BREEDING LIST FOR ALFRED COVE/PT WAYLEN

Australian Shelduck	Singing Honeyeater
Pacific Black Duck	Red Wattlebird
Buff-banded Rail	Australian Magpie
Red-capped Plover	Australian Raven
Black-winged Stilt	POSSIBLE BREEDING SPECIES
Domestic Pigeon	Spotless Crake
Laughing Turtle-Dove	Fairy Tern
Galah	Musk Lorikeet (extinct? — has bred)
Port Lincoln Parrot	Clamorous Reed Warbler
Rainbow Bee-eater	Rufous Whistler
Welcome Swallow	Striated Pardalote
Tree Martin	Silvereye
Richard's Pipit	Brown Honeyeater
Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike	Australian Magpie-Lark
Little Grass-bird	
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	TOTAL BREEDING LIST = 30
Varied Sittella	

The September 1982 edition of W.A. Bird Notes (No.23) contained an interesting article on the Point Waylen-Alfred Cove area. Seventy one species were listed. The above brings matters up to date and provides a fine illustration of the value of consistent observation over a period of years. The increase in the species list to 132 is notable and the additional comments on rarity and breeding enhance the value of the data. (Ed.)

OBSERVATIONS

collated by Rodney Vervest and Roger Jaensch

The following records have been partly vetted and should receive further scrutiny before publication in RAOU Reports or in technical journals. Observers are encouraged to submit copies of field notes with all accounts of unusual sightings. The *Atlas of Australian Birds*, Serventy and Whittell's *Birds of Western Australia* and regional lists (e.g. Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne) by the W.A. Museum should be useful guides to records that are unusual with respect to distribution or status.

This series mainly covers the period from January to July of 1987. Shire names are given in brackets. Where known, the observer is identified by an abbreviation — abbreviations are listed below.

Observations that appear in other articles in this newsletter may not be repeated here.

Please send details of sightings to 'The Observations Officer' at the W.A. Office of the RAOU.

DOWN SOUTH

Hoary-headed Grebe — 1890, 25/1/87, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale) — DJ

Fiordland Penguin — 1, 19/7/87, Cape Leeuwin: captured and released after examination — SK, JJ

Wandering Albatross — 4, 27/3/86, Point Ann (Fitzgerald River National Park): 2 adults and 2 immatures — BN

Yellow-nosed Albatross — 1, 8/6/87, Strickland Bay, Rottneest: seen preening on sea-weed beach — BM • 1, 25/7/87, Two Rocks (Wanneroo) — IS, BWi

Southern Giant-Petrel — 2, 28/6/87, North Mole, Fremantle: one pale phase bird — IS, BWi • 1, Eyre Bird Observatory: a beach-washed specimen — BW, GH

Wilson's Storm-Petrel — 1, 15/5/87, Esperance — BBa • 1, 18/6/87, North Mole, Fremantle — DW

Little Egret — 1, 7/8/87, Monkey Mia, Shark Bay — LB

Eastern Reef Egret — 3, 23/7/87, Point Peron (Rockingham) — PRH

Yellow-billed Spoonbill — 12, 30/5/87, Lake Herdsman (Perth) — IS, BW • 44, July 1987, Leschenault Inlet (Harvey) — DW • 52, 11/7/87, Coodanup, Peel Inlet (Murray) — PW

Royal Spoonbill — 1, 10/5/87, Coodanup, Peel Inlet (Murray) — PW

Freckled Duck — 1, 11/1/87, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale) — DJ • 3, 14/7/87, Barrett-Lennard Lake (Gingin) — RJ • 5, 4/8/87, Gibb Rd swamp (Armadale) — DW

Cape Barren Goose — 5, June-July 1986, Culham Inlet (Ravensthorpe) — BN

Pacific Black Duck — 8, 3/8/87, Lake Herdsman: first clutch of young ducklings noted for 1987-88 season — EMc

exotic waterfowl — 46, 14/3/87, Bibra Lake (Cockburn) — DJ

Grey Teal — 9000, 29/3/87, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale) — DJ, PC

Chestnut Teal — 5, 27/5/87, Byenup Lagoon (Manjimup): 3 males and 2 females — RV • 1, 31/5/87, Yangebup Lake (Cockburn) — PRH • 8, 30/7/87, Ten Mile Pool, Murchison River — BB

Blue-billed Duck — 370, 13/6/87, Mongers Lake (Perth) — NB

Square-tailed Kite — 1, early July 1987, Banjup (Serpentine) : flying over patchy banksia/jarrah woodland — DW, SM

White-bellied Sea-Eagle — 1, 11/5/87, Point Moore, Geraldton — PM

Little Eagle — 1, 28/6/87, Yangebup Lake (Cockburn) — PRH

Spotted Harrier — 1, 12/6/87, Barker's Swamp, Rottneest — BM

Peregrine Falcon — 2, 24/1/87, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale) — JM • 1, 13/7/87, Canning Highway, Como: soaring high, then dived steeply towards houses in South Perth — RJ

Australian Crake — 1, 19/6/87, Eyre Bird Observatory: crashed into the observatory roof during a night-flight — BW, GH

Spotless Crake — several calling in flooded grassland, early July 1987, Alcoa claypits (Rockingham) — DW, SM

Dusky Moorhen — 118, 18/1/87, Canning River (Canning) — DJ, BF

Eurasian Coot — 7670, 25/1/87, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale) — DJ

Masked Lapwing — 1, since early April 87, Boulder Sewage Works — GB (This was the northern subspecies miles, considered vagrant in the South-West and Goldfields Regions though possibly expanding its range — OO)

Hooded Plover — 2, 12/5/87, Lake Clifton (Mandurah) — AD

Little Ringed Plover — 1, 12/4/87, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale) — DJ, JM

Double-banded Plover — 1, 18/7/87, Guraga Lake (Gingin) — BBu, ABu

Large Sand Plover — 6, 13/3/87, Boat Harbour, Mandurah — AD • 4, 29/3/87, Creery Island, Peel Inlet (Murray) — JH

Black-winged Stilt — 3020, 15/2/87, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale) — DJ

Eastern Curlew — 10, 29/3/87, Creery Island, Peel Inlet (Murray) — JH • 4, 31/5/87, Creery Island — AD

Wood Sandpiper — 18, 15/2/87, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale) — DJ (Up to 18 birds were seen in four surveys from mid-February to late-April: only one bird was recorded in April — OO)

Greenshank — 200, 29/3/87, Creery Island, Peel Inlet (Murray) — JH

Terek Sandpiper — 1, 11/6/87, Lake Baghdad, Rottneest: seen feeding with 3 Red-capped Plovers — BM • 2, 12/6/87, Serpentine River Delta (Peel Inlet) — AD

Bar-tailed Godwit — 500, 29/3/87, Creery Island, Peel Inlet (Murray) — JH • 7, 17/6/87, Government House Lake, Rottneest — BM

Great Knot — 1, 12/3/87, Gordon Inlet (Fitzgerald River National Park) — BN

Pectoral Sandpiper — 1, 29/3/87, Creery Island, Peel Inlet (Murray) — JH

Long-toed Stint — 3, 15/3/87, Yangebup Lake (Metro) — PRH • 1, 27/4/87, Forrestdale Lake — DJ

Sanderling — 2, 2/5/87, Woodman Point (Cockburn) — IS, BW

Broad-billed Sandpiper — 2, 26/2/87, Lake Clifton (Mandurah) — AD

Great Skua — 2, 28/6/87, North Mole, Fremantle — IS, BW • 1, 4/7/87, Woodman Point (Cockburn) — IS, BW

Silver Gull — 1900, 14/3/87, Bibra Lake (Cockburn) — DJ

Arctic Jaeger — 8, 25/4/87, North Mole, Fremantle: birds in both plumage phases seen — IS, BW

Kelp Gull — 2, 18/4/87, Quoin Head (Fitzgerald River National Park) — MHB (Kelp Gulls may be expanding their distribution in southern WA. Care must be taken in distinguishing this species from the more common Pacific Gull — OO)

Common Tern — 2, 9/6/87, Boat Harbour, Mandurah — AD

Roseate Tern — 8, 9/6/87, Boat harbour, Mandurah — AD

Crested Pigeon — 6, 18/4/87, golf course, Forrestdale (Armadale) — JM

White-tailed Black-Cockatoo — 60, 21/7/87, Stirling Street, Perth — IS, BW

Little Corella — 1500, 7/3/87, Beatalynna Pool (Greenough) — PM

Rock Parrot — 1, 6/7/87, Twilight Cove (Eyre) — BW, GH

Pallid Cuckoo — 1, 5/7/87, Wilura Road, Mundaring — BBa

Masked Owl — 1, 17/5/87, photographed in paperbarks at Bibra Lake (Metro) — WM (Rarely observed and sometimes confused with the Barn Owl, this species has a poorly known distribution. Observations suggest that the Masked Owl is sedentary and more abundant in coastal districts than in inland districts. A cave-dwelling population exists on the Nullabor Plain — OO)

White-backed Swallow — 20+, 30/5/87, Lake Herdsman — IS, BW

White-winged Fairy-wren — 12, 10/7/87, Cocklebidy Cave on Arubiddy Station — BW, GH

Shy Hylacola — 2, April 87, Kybelup Creek, a tributary of the Phillips River (Ravensthorpe) — MHB

Calamanthus — 1, 27/6/87, Bodey's Swamp (Gingin) — BBu, ABu

White-naped Honeyeater — 1, 7/7/87, Manning Lake (Cockburn) — anon

Red-eared Firetail — 4, 26/7/87, Muir Lake Nature Reserve (Manjimup) — RV

Zebra Finch — 1, March 87, Eyre Bird Observatory: a first for Eyre — BW, GH

Common Starling — 1, June 87, Sampson Road, Mosman — MHB

Pied Butcherbird — 1, 14/7/87, 7 km N of Mandurah — LH (Observers on the coastal plain should be wary of Grey Butcherbirds that are more 'pied' in appearance than Greys depicted in some textbooks — OO)

UP NORTH

Great-billed Heron — 1, 27/5/87, Roe River — WA Naturalists Club

White-bellied Sea-Eagle — 1, 9/7/87, Lake Macleod (N of Carnarvon) — RV, EH

Brahminy Kite — 1, 9/7/87, Lake MacLeod (N of Carnarvon) — RV, EH

Peregrine Falcon — 1, 9/7/87, Lake MacLeod (N of Carnarvon) — RV, EH

Orange-footed Scrubfowl — 1, 25/5/87, Naturalist Island, Prince Frederick Harbour: heard calling during the night — JT

Eastern Curlew — 2, 25/7/87, Crab Creek near Broome — BH

Terek Sandpiper — 1, 25/7/87, Crab Creek near Broome — BH

Torresian Imperial-Pigeon — 6, 29/5/87, Boomerang Bay (Bigge Island): small flock — RD et al.

Emerald Dove — 2, 27/5/87, Naturalist Island, Prince Frederick Harbour — JT

Rainbow Pitta — 2, 27/5/87, Naturalist Island, Prince Frederick Harbour — JT

Varied Triller — several, 25/5/87, Naturalist Island, Prince Frederick Harbour — JT

Rufous Fantail — 1, 27/5/87, Naturalist Island, Prince Frederick Harbour — JT

White-lined Honeyeater — 6, 27/5/87, Naturalist Island, Prince Frederick Harbour: group of mostly immature birds — JT

Red-headed Honeyeater — 2, 7/7/87, Derby: home garden — KO

Gouldian Finch — 2, 7/7/87, Wyndham Caravan Park: on bird-food and water table with five other species of finch — KO

Spangled Drongo — 1, 26/5/87, tidal reaches of the Hunter River — JT • 1, 28/5/87, Bigge Island, Boomerang Bay — JT

KEY TO OBSERVER CODES

ABu — Anne Buchanan	JT — Jeremy Talbot
AD — Austin Daw	KO — Kimberley Observer
BBu — Bruce Buchanan	LB — Lola Broadhurst
BBa — Bryan Barrett	LH — Lesley Harrison
BBe — Barbara Bellairs	MHB — Mary Bremner
BF — Bryony Fremlin	NB — Norah Brockman
— Barbara Hale	OO — Observations Officer
BM — Bill McRoberts	PC — Peter Curry
BN — Brenda Newbey	PM — Peter Mack
BW — Brice Wells	PRH — Peel Howden
BWi — Bev Wicox	PW — Peter Wilmot
DW — Doug Watkins	RD — Ros Denny
DJ — David James	RJ — Roger Jaensch
EH — Evan Holmes	RV — Rodney Vervest
EMc — Eric McCrum	SK — Steve Keeling
GH — Gail Hooper	SM — Shapelle McNea
JH — John Hansen	WM — Wayne Merritt
JJ — Judi Jenkins	WZ — Wayne Zadow
JM — John Malone	NB

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY REPORT

Since our last report many things have happened, and time has flown by at an incredible speed. We've been to Melbourne to take part in the RAOU's Scientific Day and found it a valuable experience; we've become licensed banders and have learned to enjoy this important aspect of ornithology; we've hosted the Warden's Seminar which is held every two years and have been involved in four more courses, plus a visit from the C.U. Outside Club. In between we've done the ordinary tasks of running a bird observatory and have even tried to improve the track down the scarp.

Life at an observatory is full of personal glimpses and exciting discoveries about bird behaviour and idiosyncrasies. We've had Grey Butcherbirds standing on tiptoe to peer in the kitchen windows, one of them growling in the most remarkable way. We enjoyed an immature Collared Sparrowhawk bathing in the front birdbath on five occasions and taking up to twenty minutes to do so. We've banded, with Geoff Shannon, Eyre's first Grey Fantail and recaptured (twice) a male Blue-breasted Fairy-wren first banded by Doug Watkins in 1980. Perhaps the highlight has been a female Pygmy Possum which took up residence in a nesting box placed in a big mallee near the powerhouse many months ago and is rearing three young. This was in spite of the occasional intrusion by interested spectators. There are now two more boxes in the dunes and seven more ready to be placed. One of the new boxes already has a nest in it. We are hoping to learn something useful about the possums from this experiment.

Since our first visit to Arubiddy Station we've decided to write up a separate list for the area, and also to visit it on a more or less regular basis. In part this is to try and monitor the movements or otherwise of the Blue Bonnet which does appear to be relatively common in the myall country. In addition there is a variety of birds common in the comparatively bare plains of the station that are rare or missing "over the road" in our observing area. We also live in hope of finding Nullarbor Quail-thrush and Scarlet-chested Parrot.

Seven members of the RAOU (WA Group) made the trip to Eyre in July and we had a great time. Seventy-six species of bird were found in a week, a great achievement in mallee in winter. Only two of these were not found within our boundaries — the Blue Bonnets and two families of White-winged Fairy-wrens discovered near Cocklebidy Cave. The other big thrill for Brice at least (Gail was forced to miss out due to impending visitors) was abseiling down the Doline at Tommy Graham's cave. It must be admitted that he felt very dry in the mouth, walking backwards over the edge of a hundred foot drop, but it was a great experience. We are grateful to the C.U. Outside Club for inviting both of us to join them.

As this report is being written we are preparing for the arrival of the sixteen participants in the "Wintering with Whales" course. We hope the whales have written the dates in their diaries because they are not only late, for the first time in about ten years, but are absent as well. A whale course without the "Right" stars lacks a vital ingredient.

G. Hooper

B. Wells

WATERBIRD STUDIES

Nature Reserve Book

The report of the 1981-1985 survey of waterbirds in 200 Nature Reserves of the South-West has been completed and has been sent to the Dept. of CALM for editing and preparation for publishing.

The manuscript was 1000 pages long, which will condense to 200-250 pages printed, so we are not certain how long it will be before the book is published. It may be six months. The Nature Reserve Book will be a landmark publication in waterbird research and conservation.

All who made a significant contribution (in terms of numbers

of surveys conducted), will receive a free copy of the book when published.

Regular Monitoring

Many have continued (since 1985) to conduct regular surveys of waterbirds at nature reserves, while others have begun regular surveys of waterbirds at non-reserve wetlands. Some observers have sent in data from occasional visits to other wetlands.

A sincere THANK YOU for making these valuable contributions to the knowledge and conservation of waterbirds in W.A.

Over the past month (and in coming months), waterbird data sheets submitted to the office since June 1985 (about 1200 of them), have been sent to the UWA computer for adding to the earlier data from nature reserves. When this big task has been completed, we will be able to send you a printout summarising waterbird counts from the wetland(s) that you have surveyed since 1985.

Your information will be used as follows:

(a) Data for wetlands that are considered to be important (for waterbirds) and threatened will be summarised in a special publication which should be prepared later this year, and updated in 18 months time. Although the data is always accessible, such that the interests of waterbirds can be represented if a conservation crisis arises at a particular wetland, it is more likely that government will protect important threatened wetlands if their importance to waterbirds is set out in a short report.

(b) The RAOU is maintaining a 'Waterbird Data Bank', to which waterbird counts from any wetland in the State may be added. This Bank is a resource that can be used to put the importance for waterbirds of any particular wetland into perspective (i.e. to compare it with all other wetlands surveyed) and it can also provide information about wetlands in a particular area that may be subject to some development proposal or other threat, so that the interests of waterbirds are given due consideration. Furthermore, the Bank can be called upon when general knowledge about waterbirds in W.A. is required.

Consequently, the greater the number of wetlands at which at least one survey has been made and the greater the number of surveys at any one wetland — the better! Every waterbird data sheet submitted to the RAOU is valuable and is put to a variety of good uses.

Access to the data is strictly controlled by the Waterbirds Officer. Consultants and persons seeking to use the information for profit (e.g. a book) are required to pay the RAOU for access to its information.

For the next six months... If you have made occasional surveys of wetlands (apart from the Great Duck Count) since June 1985, please note how your data will be used (see above), and please contribute further data as you wish.

Great Duck Counts

We have commenced preparation of a short publication which will outline the principal results of the 1986 and 1987 Great Duck Counts. The report should be released later this year, with a free copy being sent to all who participated in either Count.

Remote Wetland Expeditions

The final report of the 1986 Expedition to Lakes Argyle and Gregory will be prepared and released later this year. A free copy will be sent to each participant.

1987 Expedition to Lake McLeod and Shark Bay. These wetlands are probably of international importance for waterbirds, especially waders, but we lack comprehensive data to confirm this importance. We plan to survey Lake MacLeod from Monday 28 September to Friday 2 October, and Shark Bay from Saturday 3 October to Friday 9 October. Both wetlands are unique in their own way and well worth seeing. Self-contained participants are now being sought, to join all or part of this survey, to act as observers or assistants. Some transport may be available.

Please contact Rodney Vervest at the RAOU W.A. OFFICE 909 364 6202 if you would like to join us in this important research expedition.

Egrets and Bitterns

Small numbers of RAOU members have been involved in our post-1985 research on breeding by Great Egrets and Australasian Bitterns. First reports of this work will be prepared later this year.

We are eager to hear from anyone who suspects that egrets

or bitterns are breeding in a particular wetland during the forthcoming 1987-1988 breeding season. Information will be treated in confidence if necessary.

CONTACT the RAOU W.A. Office if you have any questions about the Waterbird Research program. All of this work depends on the generous voluntary assistance of W.A. bird-watchers; we are grateful for your support.

R. Jaensch
Waterbirds Officer

R. Vervest
Scientific Assistant-Waterbirds

SEA-BIRDER NEWS

SHY ALBATROSS *Diomedea cauta*

a description with comments on the bird's occurrence in waters off Western Australia

The Shy Albatross is the largest of the mollymawks discussed and is also known commonly as the White-capped Albatross. There are three subspecies: Shy Albatross, *Diomedea cauta cauta*; Salvin's Albatross, *Diomedea cauta salvini*; and the Chatham Island Albatross, *Diomedea cauta eremita*. All three differ from any of the other Southern mollymawks by their distinctive white underwing pattern with fine black margin and dark mark at the base of the leading edge. In addition the bulk of the bird distinguishes it readily from the Yellow-nosed Albatross. Interestingly the Shy has a rather more distinct black brow than the Black-browed Albatross and this may well have led to false identification. The nominate race *D.c. cauta* is by far the most common of the races recorded in Australian waters although either of the other races are a possibility.

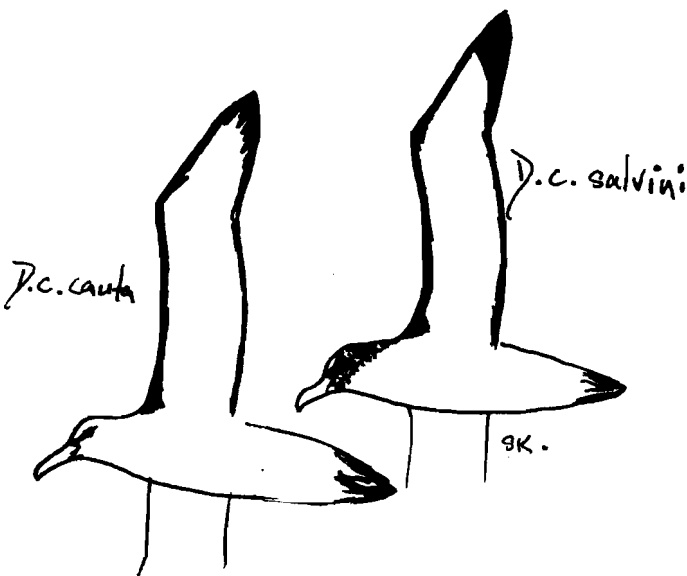
In particular care must be taken when identification of Grey-headed Albatross are made as *Diomedea c. salvini* has a distinctly grey head and here the detail of the underwing pattern is critical.

D.c. cauta is the only species of albatross to nest in Australian waters: it breeds off Tasmania and in the Auckland Islands near New Zealand. *D.c. eremita* breeds only at the Chatham Islands; and *D.c. salvini* breeds at the Bounty Islands and the Snares group.

The Shy Albatross *D.c. cauta* has previously been thought to be rarely seen off Western Australia. However, it is regularly seen from Fremantle and although it is not as common as the Yellow-nosed or the Black-browed, during heavy weather it may be seen quite close to shore. Off Cape Leeuwin it is quite common in winter months and is a regular attendant to the crayboats.

Why it has the name 'Shy' I can't understand as it readily comes to fishing boats and accepts pieces of fish thrown to it and seems no more shy than any of the other albatrosses.

S. Keeling



MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Square-tailed Kite Nesting at Kojonup

The Square-tailed Kite is one of the rarer raptors. The Atlas (Blakers et al 1984) reports 747 records of this kite compared to, for example, 5799 records of the Little Eagle. Garstone (1974) found no records of breeding areas in the Great Southern area of W.A. but two breeding areas are recorded in the Atlas.

The Nest:

Mr. Stuart Tohl, whose farm is South of Kojonup, had noticed an uncommon bird sitting on a nest seven weeks before we saw it on 26 December 1986. In a lightly timbered paddock and approximately 200 m. from the homestead was a leaning wandoo (*E. wandoo*) overhanging a frequently used track. The trunk of the tree became horizontal at a height of 12m. where it became acutely flexed to 45 degrees, and at this point (where the diameter was 20cm.) a branch was growing at 90 degrees to the trunk. The adjacent sides of the trunk and this branch formed a horizontal platform on which a nest of recently dead sticks had been built. The diameter of the nest was equal to the length of the sitting bird. A sparse overhanging canopy arose from upright branches off the main trunk so that the sitting bird was exposed to the sun for several hours a day. On the ground beneath the nest amongst the droppings some large Square-tailed Kite feathers were found but no prey remnants were seen other than in pellets.

The Birds:

The conspicuous feature of the sitting bird was the white face, throat and front of the head, where the colour changed fairly abruptly at the vertex to rufous, coarsely streaked with black. The latter colouration was present on the front of the neck as far as was visible. The eye was dull yellow in colour. The bill was corn coloured with a black tip. The tail protruded 3 cm. beyond the nest, and when fanned it was square cut. The nestling stood up on only one occasion. It was estimated to be one quarter grown and was covered in a light brown down.

Mr. Tohl had tried to feed the birds with Port Lincoln Ringnecks which he had shot in his orchard, but the kites ignored these dead birds. He said the mate, presumably the male, attended the nest just before dusk, so a second visit was made on 29 December 1986. At 6.45 pm, just before dusk, the male bird was seen approaching through the trees. It then perched on the edge of the nest and gave food, the nature of which was not seen, to the female, after which it flew off directly overhead to a nearby tree. Whilst gliding the long wings were upturned.

After feeding the young bird and herself the female stood on the tree trunk alongside the nest. It could be seen that the coarse black streaking disappeared at the mid chest and that the lower chest and abdomen were a rich red-brown colour.

The underwing of the male, seen briefly from 12 metres, revealed the characteristic "bulls-eyes". The rest of the underwing was dotted sparsely with unevenly sized white spots, particularly conspicuous on the primaries distal to the "bulls-eyes".

A third visit was made on 18 January 1987 (11am - 12 noon). The fledgling was now almost as large as the adult but much darker in colour. The male was sighted at 11.30 am but did not descend to the nest. When a ladder was put against a tree five metres from the nest tree the adult bird remained completely calm, reassuring the agitated chick. By 31 January the young bird was very dark in colour and was alone all day, either on the nest or standing on the branch alongside it.

A fourth visit was made on 1 March 1987. The young bird, still dark brown in colour with no white on the face, was still living at the nest site. It could fly perfectly. When upset by our presence it flew off and eventually returned to settle in a tree about 50 metres away. The paler markings were seen under the wings which had black tips but no distinct "bulls-eyes". Mr. Tohl had not sighted the parent birds for several days so it is not known if they were still returning to the nest.

The young bird was not seen at the nest site on 22 March 1987, but has remained in the area.

The Pellets:

Four pellets were examined by Dr. Catherine Kemper, mammalogist of the South Australian Museum. She identified fur from two species of mammal but found no bone fragments. A few red feathers attached to the surface of the pellets were from a Western Rosella. Dr. Eric Matthews, entomologist at the S.A. Museum, identified remnants of 33 insects. These consisted of *Coleoptera* (beetles) comprising *Scarabaeidae* 8, *Curculionidae* 2, *Chrysomelidae* 3, unknown 2; *Hymenoptera* 7 (one large ant, three small ants, one bee, two wasps or bees); *Hemiptera*, *Pentatomidae* (plant louse); *Orthoptera*, *Acrididae* (grass hoppers) 2; unidentified insects 7. Of the *Scarabaeidae* five were species of *Liparetrus*, and of the *Chrysomelidae* one was a *Paropsis* species and one was a *Cadmus* species.

S. Ferguson
J.M. Bonnin

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DOUBLE-BANDED PLOVER

At present Anne and I are undertaking a once a month water-bird count at Guraga Lake in Dandaragan Shire. A large expanse of water, roughly circular and 1.5 kilometres in diameter, it has large areas of gently sloping sand on its margins, particularly on its southern edges. While the Lake gives an impression like that of the central wheatbelt (there are parallels with Lakes Kondinin and Jilakin), Guraga is actually only 28 kilometres from the coast. This may account for the good variety of waders seen since January 1987, when our monthly surveys started. Already recorded by us have been Grey Plover, Red-capped Plover, Lesser Golden Plover, Common Sandpiper, Greenshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, Pectoral Sandpiper and Curlew Sandpiper.

On 18 July 1987, we were at the southern end of the Lake counting a large mixed party of Red-necked Stints, Red-capped Plovers and two Curlew Sandpipers which were moving across a large sand area. I was watching Red-capped Plovers appear from behind a slight sand hillock through the telescope at about 50 metres when a slightly larger more upright bird appeared. Its most obvious and striking characteristic was two breast bands — a Double-banded Plover.

The bird, of which there was only the one, obligingly remained stationary to allow a full examination and taking this in and making notes again obligingly allowed us to approach to within 20 metres for further inspection.

The upper breast band was dark, apparently black. The lower broader band a golden brown colour. The lower band was completely across the breast but patchy. The bill was slightly larger than that of the adjacent Red-capped Plovers as was its overall size, with its stance rather more upright. Eye large black, legs yellow-green. The head and back were a grey-brown. A dark line ran from the bill round the eye to the ear area making the above eye and forehead white the more striking.

Looking at illustrations later, the head was very similar to the breeding illustration in Pizzey and Doyle (1980). However, the colour of the head and back seems too dark here and the colours in Lane, Shorebirds in Australia (1987) are much closer to the bird seen. A black edge at the top of the forehead, a conspicuous feature of the illustration in Simpson and Day (1984) and clear in Lane (1987) was not noticed at all. It may possibly be a much less obvious feature, as in Slater (1972) and the photographs in Every Australian Bird Illustrated (1975) and Readers Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds (1979).

It is possible that this is the most northerly sighting of a Double-banded Plover in W.A.

Would be Guraga visitors should note access is definitely 4WD only, particularly in the wet, for there is deep sand and the final 400 metres of access road doubles as a creek.

B. Buchanan

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Any Time is a Good Time for Birdwatching

Earlier this year I had occasion to need two trips to hospital for major surgery. However I saw no reason to break my daily habit of bird recording, usually carried out in our leafy Applecross garden, so except for three days when I was "hors de combat" I recorded every day.

My first hospital room faced towards the city and I had the pleasure early one morning of watching four Black Swans heading from the river towards one of the City's lakes. Another morning a scattered flock of about 150 White-tailed Black Cockatoos flew noisily past, while a small tightly-knit group of Little Corellas tried to evade them. A tall silky oak (*Grevillea robusta*) whose upper branches were opposite my window on the fourth floor provided an endless source of interest. I easily identified 7 species which came and went at varying times of the day.

On the second visit, my room looked over the Swan River and I soon found that a pair of Great Egrets and a pair of Australian Pelicans could be seen regularly on either one shore or the other. The Australian Pelicans were aggressive and once one deliberately chased a Great Egret away from fishing activities in the rushes. Numerous Pacific Black Duck, Eurasian Coots and Little Pied Cormorants were always to be found, but I only once saw a Black Swan, feeding in midstream early in the morning. Tern species occasionally passed and dived for fish but I never saw one catch anything. Little Black Cormorants arrived in clouds one day, skein after skein, when fish were rising. They provided a marvellous spectacle as different patches of river erupted in fish. Another day six Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes flew from tree to tree in a family group.

The raptor population was interesting. I saw an Australian Kestrel daily and he often perched on the crown of a tall conifer nearby. In a top sturdy fork of this tree was a large nest, which from its construction must originally have been that of an Australian Raven. From his proprietary manner I suspected, but cannot prove, that the Australian Kestrel may wish to use the nest himself in season.

Heavy rain one night must have flushed prey from the marshes across the river. Next day a Little Eagle swooped low in a wide circle but did not catch anything. He then rose to a great height and I watched him follow the river upstream, soaring in large overlapping circles. Later a Black-shouldered Kite appeared over the same marshes, then used a stunted tree for a look-out perch. Lastly a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, presumably an aviary escapee, flew to a tree top and called for a while.

For a birdwatcher even a stay in hospital can have its lighter side.

K. Highman

Inter-species Aggression

Birds have been described as aggressive. MacDonald (1980) writes of vocal and visual aggression, essentially for the obtaining and maintenance of territory. Fisher (1940) revised by Flegg (1978) speaks of intimidatory behaviour for similar purposes and Rowley (1982) speaks of "competition between two individuals of the same species...to gain possession of a particular requisite...food, breeding or nesting site, of a mate. Aggression may also arise because many species of birds do not like other individuals to approach too closely to them." (pp46-47)

Ardrey (1966) in an entertaining book with a wealth of bird examples, emphasises the importance of the defence of territory. The second meeting of the W.A. Branch of the RAOU on 24 July 1943 was addressed by Dr D. Serventy on the changing ideas about the importance of territory in bird behaviour. He referred to Fisher (1940) then not long published. The pioneering work

which led to a reappraisal of the significance of territory is set out in Ardrey (1956) — a book all bird lovers should find of interest.

The essence of the writing of the authors quoted is that aggression is between "two individuals of the same species" (Rowley 1982 p.46). However, none write of aggression between birds of different species (not I am sure because they are unaware of it), which has been an interesting offshoot of my own bird observing.

Some of the aggression incidents I have seen quite obviously (and probably all) derived from the same "motives" as the intra-specific attacks which Rowley (1982) sets out, food, site or a mate (p.47). It is of interest, however, that the great majority of inter-species aggression is by a bird smaller than the bird attacked. This has been the case in virtually all of the ninety plus cases I have noted in the last eighteen months. The reason for this may be that the larger bird is unable to retaliate effectively. The larger the bird the greater the wing span, generally speaking, creating higher wing load when turning at speed, so allowing the smaller bird to turn inside the turning circle of the larger and elude counter-attack.

While the difference in size between some is very small such as Red-capped Plover attacking a Red-necked Stint, a Silvereye vs a Yellow-rumped Thornbill, or a New Holland Honeyeater vs a White-naped Honeyeater, five observations have been of larger vs smaller — a Red Wattlebird vs Rufous Whistler, Red Wattlebird vs Willie Wagtail, Red Wattlebird vs White-cheeked Honeyeater, White-breasted Robin vs Silvereye and (small difference) New Holland Honeyeater vs Brown Honeyeater. Both Red Wattlebirds and the Robin family have a reputation for aggression, Red Wattlebirds often attacking other birds seeking nectar.

Usually the attacker is the smaller bird, at times it is ludicrously so. The loud calls of an Australian Magpie being furiously pursued by a Tree Martin was what attracted my attention, an interesting reversal, as Australian Magpie seem to be a fairly aggressive species. Other large size disparities have included a Little Black Cormorant vs a Pelican, a Silver Gull vs a Pelican (The Silver Gull flew just over the Pelican's head which raised its beak vertically and "snapped" at the Silver Gull, Red Wattlebird vs Great Egret and Willie Wagtail vs Australian Raven. Willie Wagtail vs Australian Raven encounters seem to be not infrequent (I have recorded nine) possibly because both, being ground foragers are easy to observe. On one occasion, as an Australian Raven was unmoved by much fluttering and vocal attack, the Willie Wagtail hopped on to the back of the larger bird and pecked vigorously at the Australian Raven's neck. This evoked a loud "aah" from the Australian Raven which made the Willie Wagtail leap off and behind its victim.

Another interesting encounter was between a Willie Wagtail and an Australian Magpie both on the ground. The Australian Magpie had only one leg and so had difficulty coping with the Willie Wagtail fluttering just behind its head and darting at it from behind, while alternating its side of attack. The Australian Magpie hopped over to a nearby tree and stood against it, its head (and beak) turned outward. With only one angle of attack and that clearly defensible, the Willie Wagtail promptly desisted and took refuge on a branch of the tree against which the Australian Magpie stood.

Attacks on raptors by non-raptors are well known. I have seen Willie Wagtail, Banded Lapwing and Dusky Woodswallow vs Australian Kestrel, Australian Magpie Lark and Australian Raven vs Square-tailed Kite, Australian Magpie vs Black-shouldered Kite, three occasions of Australian Magpie Lark vs Whistling Kite, Black-faced Woodswallow vs Little Eagle, Tree Martin vs Brown Goshawk and Australian Raven vs Wedge-tailed Eagle. In general these "attacks" are not pushed home to actual contact or even contact attempts and are presumably "spoiling" or "diversionary". The raptor must have difficulty in hunting successfully with another bird circling and calling in close proximity.

Two attacks have been more noteworthy. In one an Australian Magpie Lark rose steeply from a tree "disapproving" in vocal terms of a Whistling Kite. Approaching from almost beneath, the Australian Magpie Lark rolled over onto its back and struck at the Whistling Kite with its talons. On another occasion an Australian Kestrel repeatedly stooped on a Brown Goshawk, which however only caused the Brown Goshawk to take minor

evasive action, the meanwhile continuing a slow glide. The Brown Goshawk took real evasive action when its attacker was joined by an Australian Magpie which came up in a frontal attack (while the Australian Kestrel continued attacking the rear). With its greater speed the Brown Goshawk moved off rapidly. In this "attack" a raptor attacked another raptor a situation which may not be too unusual as I have also seen a Marsh Harrier vs Wedge-tailed Eagle and a Marsh Harrier vs Whistling Kite.

Birds under attack rarely seem to make any effort to return the attack. This may be because of their recognition that a smaller bird can evade a response but on one occasion I have seen an attacked bird take "positive" action. An Australian Raven was pursuing a Little Eagle, rising up to the Little Eagle towards its tail. The Little Eagle occasionally "accelerated" to maintain a distance from its pursuer when in an apparently effortless movement the Little Eagle went into a backward half roll, rising well upward before plunging vertically some metres past the front of the oncoming Australian Raven before gliding upward on to its former course. I had just remarked on the easy elegance of the evasive action when the procedure was repeated. The Little Eagle again effortlessly rose into a backward half roll, but on the second occasion judged its tactics better and the Australian Raven suddenly found a Little Eagle dropping towards it at high speed, talons thrust down. The Australian Raven turned sharply and flew rapidly in the opposite direction; the Little Eagle again completed its manoeuvre with the same ease and resumed its inspection of a swamp uninterrupted.

Red Wattlebird's in my observations are the greatest attackers (18 times) they have attacked Grey Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Port Lincoln Ringneck (3 occasions), Rufous Whistler, Kookaburra, Willie Wagtail, Grey Currawong, Australian Raven (5 occasions), Great Egret and dogs, Willie Wagtail rates next with 16 attacks, Australian Raven (9), Australian Magpie (2), Red Wattlebird, Grey Butcherbird, Australian Kestrel, Sacred Kingfisher and dogs. Well down the list are Australian Magpie Larks with nine attacks (on Brown Goshawk, Whistling Kite (3), Australian Raven (2), Kookaburra, White-tailed Black Cockatoo and Square-tailed Kite) and Australian Magpies with four attacks (on Brown Goshawk, Australian Raven, Galah, Black Shouldered Kite and, of course, humans) Other attackers have been Silver Gull (vs Little Egret), Little Black Cormorant (vs Caspian Tern), Tree Martin (vs Pallid Cuckoo), Singing Honeyeater (vs Southern Boobook, Red Wattlebird, Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike), Crested Tern (vs Caspian Tern), Western Thornbill (vs Horsefield's Bronze Cuckoo), Sacred Kingfisher (vs Red-capped Parrot), Grey Butcherbird (vs Willie Wagtail and Red Wattlebird), Yellow-throated Miners (mobbing an Australian Magpie Lark), and a Yellow Plumed Honeyeater (vs Red Wattlebird).

The majority of the attacks I have seen have been during Spring (so the hormonal/territorial element is probably involved) but similar encounters occur at all other times of the year.

B. Buchanan

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EXCURSION REPORTS

LAKE MEALUP — 9 May

Intermittent heavy rain greeted the sixteen people who visited Lake Mealup. On our first walk we inspected the western edge of Lake Mealup, still dry, before walking on to the small lake immediately to the west. The need for management of *Typha* in both lakes was appreciated. We then explored the surrounding bushland, which is dominated by several species each of Eucalypt and Banksia. Birds seen included Golden and Rufous Whistlers, Varied Sittella, White-browed Scrubwren, Splended Fairy-wren, Scarlet Robin and both Inland and Yellow-rumped Thornbills.

In the afternoon we visited the southern perimeter of Lake

